

by Master Sgt. Efrain Gonzalez



COMMANDING THE FORCE

When America needed you the most, you answered the call.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, attack on America, active duty, Guard and Reserve Airmen, civilians and contractors amassed to protect the homeland and take the fight to the enemy. It's a noble cause that can be seen in the eyes of maintainers after 16 hours of work, pilots after 12-hours of flying and security forces after endless hours of patrolling a perimeter.

The United States liberated 25 million people in Afghanistan. In October, during their first election in 5,000 years, about 10 million Afghans registered to vote. About 40 percent of the voters were women, who under the Taliban didn't have the right to vote, to an education, to live a normal life. And Iraq is scheduled to have its first election this month.

Granted, those two milestones weren't easily attained. To date, the airlift operation into Afghanistan is the third largest effort of

its kind, ranking behind Operation Vittles of the Berlin Airlift and Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. The Combined Air Operations Center continues to plan and execute 50 combat sorties, 50 combat support sorties and 150 mobility sorties per day throughout the Southwest Asia region. In addition, at any given time, Noble Eagle aircraft are flying air patrol missions over more than 15 U.S. cities.

All this — "In Defense of Freedom."
— Master Sgt. Orville Desjarlais